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## THE SELF-REVELATION OF CHRIST, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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A standing objection to the apostolic authorship of the fourth gospel grows out of the early connection of Jesus with the messianic hope. This evangelist, it is urged, represents that lofty claims were made by Jesus at the very beginning of the public ministry, while in the synoptics we have a gradual revelation of the messianic consciousness, and not until Cæsarea Philippi does Jesus encourage or permit his disciples to regard him as the Christ. The conclusion to which such objectors arrive is that the fourth gospel is historically untrustworthy. The contention of this paper is that the antagonism here between the fourth gospel and the synoptics is more apparent than real, and that the self-revelation of Christ cannot be properly traced without the fourth gospel.

The Messiah idea was not originated by the apostles and read back into their Master's self-consciousness, as some dogmatically maintain; but, having sprung from Judaism, it was adopted by Jesus and reproduced by the apostles. That Jesus believed himself to be the Christ is beyond doubt. Some unquestionable evidences are the manner in which he received that title from Simon Peter, the acceptance of popular acclaims at his entry of Jerusalem, and his answer to the high-priest. And it must be remembered that revelation consists in more than spoken words—it is frequently wordless. A man's public speech or silence must be interpreted in the light of the popular conceptions of his age and country. What the people generally believe explains his utterances, and sometimes makes it unnecessary to speak at all.

1. *The people's expectations.*—In the New Testament is evidence that the hope of Israel had come to center in a personal Messiah. We find the hope not only in explicit statements, but, what is more conclusive, in indirect and unconscious testimony to its wide currency.

The appearance of the Baptist caused great excitement. He announced the messianic kingdom. He proclaimed a coming One who would baptize with the Holy Ghost. His preaching was such as to fan the messianic hopes into a flame, and they looked to him as a messianic possibility. Luke, who verified his sources by the testimony of contemporaries, says: "The people were in expectation and all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John, whether haply he were the Christ" (Luke 3:15). Crowds flocked to him, and he had to answer their feverish expectations (Luke 3:16, 17; John 1:19-27). The words of the Baptist in the other accounts were clearly an answer to the thought that he might be the Messiah (cf. the prominence of 'Eyō, and especially of μέν in Matthew and Luke), and Paul's speech at Antioch shows that such was the popular understanding of these words (Acts 13:25). This address was given but a few years after Christ's death, and the record of it precedes the fourth gospel, so that John 1:19-27 is confirmed by the tradition quoted thus early by Paul and recorded by the author of Acts. From the book of Acts and Paul's epistles it is apparent that the Jews of the dispersion did not need to be taught to look for Messiah, but only to be convinced that this Jesus was he. In remote regions of Asia and in distant Europe, to which the Christian movement had not extended, Paul started with the fact that the Jews were expecting Christ, and he demonstrated from the resurrection of Jesus that the expected One had come.

A final proof that hopes of a messianic king were prevalent at this time is found in the narrative of the temptation. Here two things are certainly implied: that Jesus knew himself to be the Messiah, and that he had to reckon with a popular messianic expectation. The question was whether he should conform to the messianic hopes that were current. His decision was to keep the idea of the king in the background for a time, for the very reason that a political messianic king was so fervently hoped for. So strong were these political expectations that even at the end he had not wholly cured his closest disciples. In the background of these hopes a striking figure like the Baptist, or a worker of cures like Jesus, would attract wide attention as a messianic possibility. It would not be necessary for him to make an open claim to messiah-

ship, but rather to deny it, as the Baptist did, if he would not be so regarded. Under such conditions, for so marked a man as Jesus early became, to be silent would almost be tantamount to a claim to be Messiah.

*2. Evidence that messianic hopes early were attached to Jesus.*—This we gather chiefly from the fourth gospel. But two facts from the synoptics which have received but little attention prove that at the beginning of his ministry Jesus was regarded as a messianic possibility: (1) the attitude of the demoniacs and simple folk, (2) the attitude of the ruling classes.

At the first public act mentioned by Mark, a man with an unclean spirit cries out: "I know thee, who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). It is said (vs. 34) that the demoniacs "knew him," and many ancient authorities add "to be Christ," which seems the correct reading, as Luke, who follows Mark, inserts it (Luke 4:41b). Indeed, we are told that "the unclean spirits, whosoever they beheld him, fell down before him and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God" (Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41). Matthew, fearing the charge of collusion with Beelzebub, omits these confessions save in the case of the man in Gadara. Matthew ordinarily follows Mark, but frequently changes with an apologetic purpose. A case in point is Matt. 19:17, where he changes, "Why callest thou me good?" in the source (Mark 10:18) to, "Why askest thou me concerning that which is good?" But Matthew, while omitting the testimony of the demoniacs, concurs with Mark as to the attachment of messianic ideas to Jesus by putting messianic titles into the mouths of others. This he does even previous to Cæsarea Philippi. Thus two blind men addressed him as Son of David (Matt. 9:27); the Syrophœnician woman uses the same title (Matt. 15:22), when Mark has it not. The fact remains, although Matthew puts it in different relations, that messianic titles were applied to Jesus by afflicted persons who lived on the edge of the current of Jewish social life.

Whence came these messianic ideas? Whatever may have been the popular understanding of demoniacal possession, we cannot now believe that it was accompanied by supernatural knowledge. The demoniacs possessed no miraculous insight by which they recognized Jesus. On the contrary, a demoniac would be the last

to see in him the Christ. It was the sane and spiritually minded who recognized Jesus as the Messiah; faith in him was a revelation from God: "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 10:17). And yet "the unclean spirits, whensoever they beheld him, fell down before him and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God."

There is but one explanation. The fame of Jesus and the rumor that he might be the Messiah had preceded him into Galilee. It must have been a persistent rumor, for all the demoniacs seem to have heard it, even in distant Gadara. There seems to have been no exception, and they could not so unanimously have picked Jesus as the Messiah on any other ground. The title was not original with them; they simply repeated what they had heard. Others feared to ascribe it to him until he had been pronounced the Messiah by the priests. But the demoniacs and the afflicted were the fringe of society—a ready medium for rumor, a mouth-piece of popular opinion. They alone dared give the title which had been whispered from mouth to mouth since the messianic expectations roused by him in Jerusalem. And Jesus, remembering his experience at Jerusalem, bade them hold their peace, for he had resolved not to allow or countenance any explicit declaration of his messiahship for a time. The explanation that Jesus did not want to be confessed by devils is inadequate. His was a consistent effort to prevent for a while the precipitation of the messianic hopes that gathered about him. Later Jesus did not object to the testimony of these simple folk, and, in "the country of the Gerasenes" where there was no political danger, he not only did not rebuke the madman who called him "Son of the Most High God," but bade him publish abroad the great work done for him.

The contention of Wrede,<sup>1</sup> J. Weiss,<sup>2</sup> and Bacon<sup>3</sup> over the so-called "recognition" of Jesus by demoniacs would be bootless if any one of them allowed the possibility of truth in the Johannine representation that messianic expectations early attached themselves to Jesus. (But all are committed to prejudgment against the fourth

<sup>1</sup> *Das Messiasgeheimniß Jesu*, pp. 22–32, and *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, Vol. III (1904), pp. 169–77.

<sup>2</sup> *Das älteste Evangelium*, pp. 141–46.

<sup>3</sup> *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 1905, pp. 153–56.

gospel.) Wrede seems to argue that merely because of doctrinal prepossession Mark invents the testimony of the demoniacs and stereotypes them for occasion. Weiss and Bacon urge that some historical occurrence is necessary to account for the testimonies. Bacon selects the demoniac of Gadara (Mark 5:7), and Weiss, him of Capernaum (Mark 1:24); but neither accounts for his one historical occurrence. Why should one demoniac possess such insight when it is denied to others? The suggestion of Mathews<sup>4</sup> that these neurotics respond to Christ's own conviction as to himself in some hypnotic or telepathic fashion is superfluous. These were not recognitions at all, but the echo of a popular rumor, which in the popular mind had not been borne out by the conduct of Jesus, and so had ceased.

Another striking fact of the synoptic gospels is the attitude of the Pharisees toward Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees followed him into Galilee. They were not there as disciples, to learn of an obscure Nazarene. Why were they there? Their presence in far-off Galilee, away from the Jerusalem temple, suggests a hostile motive. At the beginning of the second chapter of Mark the opposition shows itself. At the first sabbath cure in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-28) there was no protest, for the Pharisees from Jerusalem had not yet reached him. But from now on the Pharisees dogged his footsteps, and almost immediately their hostility developed into an organized system of persecution. At the beginning of chap. 3 the Pharisees are plotting to kill Jesus. To us, considering only the synoptics, this attitude of the ruling classes is unintelligible. Jesus had healed on the sabbath, had allowed his disciples to pluck grain on the sabbath, had eaten with publicans. But other Jews had failed to observe the rigid sabbath of the Pharisees, and had eaten with publicans and sinners. Jews had ignored the Mosaic law, and had become themselves publicans and sinners, but the Pharisees had not plotted against their lives. Why should attention be so concentrated upon this Nazarene, who was unknown in Jerusalem but for the events recorded in the fourth gospel? The disciples had pulled the grain and had eaten with publicans. Why is it that even to the end the disciples of Jesus, who equally with their Master

<sup>4</sup> *The Messianic Hope in the New Testament*, p. 94.

disregarded the regulations of the Pharisees, did not excite the hostility of the ruling classes, while so early in his career the Pharisees were plotting to kill Jesus? Why not kill Peter and James as well as Jesus? The Jerusalem ministry is the only explanation.

These two facts then—the attitude of the demoniacs and blind who were in closest touch with the people, knowing all the rumors about Jesus, and yet because of their infirmity in no danger from the Pharisees and the attitude of the ruling classes toward Jesus—confirm the historicity of the early chapters in the Johannine gospel. The actual situation is that the hostility of the ruling classes appears earlier in the synoptics than in the fourth gospel, where the Jews do not seek to kill Jesus until the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1), which is later than Cæsarea Philippi. There must have been a potential assumption of messianic authority, or the ruling classes would not so early and so spitefully have singled out Jesus for destruction.

3. *The moral significance of the problem.*—The critic must examine all sources and utilize all material that is not absolutely irreconcilable. When we have documents that from the earliest times of which we have record are regarded as of equal authority, we may apply philosophic principles to their evaluation as well as principles of historical criticism. The fourth gospel, though later, is accepted as heartily as the others in earliest church records. When, therefore, it deals with the unfolding of our Lord's messianic consciousness, and the others are silent, though not hostile, we are justified in asking, What is psychologically probable? Wendt admits the "psychological singularity" of our Lord's silence with regard to his messianic consciousness, and says that it is only removed by the shortness of his public career.<sup>5</sup> Is it not rather enhanced by that fact, if Jesus made no admission whatever of his messianic consciousness under conditions when no mischief could result? But we face a moral as well as a psychological difficulty, if Jesus practiced delusion where no danger could arise. Christ's motive for silence was the good of the kingdom into which he was training a few disciples. When a confession of messiahship would endanger that schooling, he withheld it, or when a declaration of it from any

<sup>5</sup> *Teaching of Jesus*, Vol. I; p. 179.

source would precipitate trouble, he discouraged it. But Jesus must be true to himself; he must act out his own inner consciousness whenever circumstances would allow.

He was incapable of a skilful plan, a well-devised scheme, by which he would work incognito until he had prepared the way for a dramatic episode at Cæsarea Philippi, or a triumphal entry of Jerusalem. He was no adroit politician to practice strategy, but he naturally adapted himself to the method of procedure required by the interests of his kingdom, which he learned by experience. He was fearless. He did not avoid the discussion of those problems on which he departed farthest from the Pharisees and rulers. He almost invited their antagonism on questions which concerned them more than the messiahship, viz., the observance of the sabbath and the keeping of the ceremonial law. Being discreet, he would avoid throwing a firebrand among the people; but he was no trimmer. He feared the people more than the rulers. He did not want them to accept him when he discovered that they were unprepared for his ideal of the messianic kingdom. But he could not deny himself.

Giving due value, then, to direct and indirect evidence, we arrive at a natural and progressive order in the self-revelation of Jesus: He is true to his messianic consciousness. He accepts the testimony of the Baptist and the enthusiastic acclaims of his first followers. John's testimony and the "signs" he performed draw to him a crowd who seek a political Messiah. They are not attracted by any definite claim, but, in the background of their excited messianic hopes, the silence of such a man was almost a claim. Embarrassed by this popularity, he withdraws into the country, ranking himself with the prophets (John 4:44) and blanketing the current hopes of a political Messiah. After John's imprisonment he withdraws into Galilee. His reputation had preceded him, and he is given an enthusiastic reception. The Pharisees follow him because he had been identified as the Messiah. But the people quickly see that he does not fit their messianic ideas. They are discouraged by Jesus and overawed by the presence of the Pharisees. But the demoniacs and blind still address him with messianic titles that had flown from lip to lip. The ruling classes organize against him, and the populace, seeking to adjust their messianic expectations to Jesus' career, are undecided. Jesus

answers objections to his messianic authority, but makes no decisive claim. When the disciples have begun to understand his view of messiahship and are apprised of his death, Jesus begins to push the battle and is more explicit in his language. He permits himself to be acclaimed king, and in the conflict between his own kingly ideals and the popular messianic hopes he is destroyed.

This method in the unfolding of Jesus' messianic consciousness and its acceptance by the people is best traced from the fourth gospel, and is indirectly but inevitably corroborated by the synoptics. It is true to experience; for faith and hope do not develop in mathematical progression, but move as waves do—rising and falling, advancing and receding.